

## **ПРОБЛЕМА НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ В КОНТЕКСТІ ПОЛІЛОГУ КУЛЬТУР**

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## **INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND TRANSLATOR'S CULTURAL IDENTITY**

The growing scope of international business interactions and globalization of economy brings about more and more new experiences and problems in global business communication, a considerable amount of them dealing with the differences in culture specific behaviors, rules of business turnover, and cultural identities. International business deals, global outsourcing, bilateral and multilateral negotiations, workforce migration and similar processes draw the attention of ethnographers and social psychologists to the concept of cultural identity and cross-cultural adaptation. While most of research is focused on long-term changes in the psychology and behaviors of migrants, our subject of study is intercultural and meta-cultural competence as the features of cultural identity of the individuals bridging cultural gaps in intercultural communication and cultural adaptation – translators/interpreters as cross-cultural mediators.

Cultural identity is described in terms of the sense of belonging, based on the individual's ancestry, cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, and often language and religion [4]. Communication theory of identity studies cultural (and ethnic) identity as a subset of four "frames of identity": personal frame, communication frame, relationship frame, and communal frame. As a complex multifold phenomenon, cultural identity is a core of a person's identity, understanding and relation to the world, while communication is central to formation and enactment of cultural identity [5]. The aim of this study is to describe the features of the translator's cultural identity relevant for intercultural business communication in three aspects – behavioral, cognitive/communicative, and professional (specific for the business sphere).

The studies of cross-cultural interaction observe the formation of a more dynamic cultural psychology with cultures transforming more than ever before, in ways that are important to understanding [13]: many migrants negotiate multiple identities, which may no longer be discrete cultural entities, but are becoming blended and multifaceted, more flexible, capable of sustaining multiple cultural influences [11]. More and more employees in the organizations recognize themselves as multicultural individuals, who belong to two or more cultures and internationally cultural mode [2].

Fred Casmir describes the process occurring in the interaction between representatives of different cultures as ‘third culture building’, conceptualizing the framework as an active process whereby different cultural groups come together to form a third culture which becomes a common ground for all participants; a cognitive space that incorporates elements of both cultures and yet remains separate and distinct [3]. The ‘third culture’ as a “common ground” [13], a “socially determined communicative space, involving shared norms, rules, and values of its members” [11] is the foundation of cultural adaptation and successful intercultural contacts. M. Sobre-Denton introduces a concept of a ‘meta-third culture’: “Sojourners, migrants, hybridized people, and host-nationals participating in positive transitional and social experiences through multicultural support systems and intercultural dialogue form lasting cross-cultural relationships, moving toward reducing stereotypes of other cultural groups (including the host culture), and encouraging skills that are necessary in negotiating a global environment that is simultaneously growing and shrinking” [11].

Ability to understand and explain commonalities and differences between contacting cultures forms the foundations of meta-cultural competence. The idea of meta-cultural competence as “a competence that enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualisations during the process of intercultural communication” [9; 10; 12], developed in second language teaching methodology, implies the ability of individuals to embrace the basic concepts of another culture with the aim to communicate effectively. For the translator, meta-cultural competence becomes an essential qualification requirement needed to effectively manage cross-cultural communication in the course of professional activity.

The concepts of ‘meta-third culture’ and meta-cultural competence are close to our idea of shared cognitive space necessary for the translator’s effective operation in cross-cultural communication [1]. Defining the quality of translation in terms of its ability to satisfy similar cognitive and communicative needs of the audience in another culture, we believe that the effectiveness of translation is to be measured by the success in attaining the communicative goals in intercultural communication [8]. This draws attention to the features of cultures and the qualities of translator’s cultural identity essential for the formation of meta-cultural competence for effective mediation between cultures.

The multitude and variety of cultures has been categorized through a set of their specific features: following the extensive research of IBM’s operations in up to 93 countries, Geert Hofstede et al. described all the multitude of business cultures by six “cultural dimensions”: (1) collectivism vs. individualism, (2) the distance of power, (3) femininity vs. masculinity, (4) the tolerance of uncertainty in the society, (5) the degree of emotiveness and type of emotional attitudes, (6) the time perspective [7]. This study complemented E.T. Hall’s idea of ‘high-context’ or ‘low-context’ cultures [6] which focuses predominantly on the differences in communication styles, typical of the contacting cultures.

Cultural differences become the focus of attention whenever the translation fails to promote smooth interaction in global business. The view of international business communication as strategic intercultural interaction aimed at joint construction of ideas and understanding emphasizes the role of translation and translator. Translator/interpreter is responsible for the effectiveness and smoothness of communication and is involved in both language and extralinguistic interaction: choosing the time and place of meetings, informing the parties of culture specific features of behavior, adapting the degree of straightforwardness / mitigation of utterances etc.

The translator’s / interpreter’s responsibility is not to deliver the message unchanged, but to ensure the expected understanding and response by the other party in communication. Translator’s / interpreter’s strategic thinking and strategic competence is of utmost importance for the success of communication with the representatives of a different culture. Based on a shared cultural space and meta-cultural competence, the translator / interpreter is expected to select the most effective ways of interaction, ‘bridging the gaps’, explaining the differences of habits and

rituals, compensating for the lack of knowledge of particular facts or concepts, avoiding potential pitfalls in cross-cultural business dealings etc.

Along with considering the cognitive and semantic adaptations to be made for the proper perception of the message, the translator should feel responsible for an array of cultural adaptations, proactively excluding possible misbehaviors or gaffs. This implies the need for translator's / interpreter's cultural and meta-cultural competence in behavioral, cognitive/communicative cultural aspects as well as professional aspects of business turnover.

The examples of *behavioral cultural competences* may include (without limitation):

- selection of appropriate dates and places for the meetings and events (ensuring that no religious holidays or public events will interfere with the business goals);
- time planning and agenda arrangement;
- identifying the social roles and levels of responsibility of the representatives of the other culture in their social/corporate structure;
- explaining the meaning of cultural traditions, rituals, gestures/body language, facial expressions and dress code;
- explicating the avoidance of sensitive topics, meaningful pauses, silences, taboos etc.

On the other hand, *cognitive/communicative aspects* of cross-cultural communication require the translator's competence in:

- cognitive lacunae (non-equivalent concepts);
- differences in associations, attitudes, evaluations;
- communicative differences in explicitness/implicitness of messages;
- directness/indirectness of speech acts;
- the rules and nature of turn-taking in the dialogue;
- degree of emotiveness and social regulation of manifestation of emotions;
- tolerance of slang, substandard language in different cultures etc.

In addition to these competences, the translator / interpreter in global business setting is expected to possess *understanding of basic business concepts*, e.g.:

- rules of business turnover in each specific business culture;
- ways of creating and maintaining positive attitudes with business

partners;

- distribution of authority and typical decision-making;
- rules of signing/executing documents in each business culture;
- traditions of exchanging business souvenirs and gifts;
- differences in arranging meetings / business or executive dinners

in different cultures etc.

The aggregate of the above sets of competences form the core of meta-cultural competence in international business interactions, which in our opinion is central to the translator's ability to mediate effectively between business cultures. It implies not just being bicultural or multicultural, but recognizing the commonalities which make communication possible vs. differences which may cause a problem or failure in communication, and choose the strategies to prevent or overcome the problems.

Intercultural and meta-cultural competence is an essential feature of the translator's cultural identity, necessary to form the awareness of potential cross-cultural problems in global business interactions as well as strategies to solve them. More attention of intercultural business communication and translation scholars is needed to develop the sets of skills and competences the translators require to ensure effective intercultural business communication, as well as methods and procedures aimed at formation of such competences.

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